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# THE HIGH SCHOOL JOURNAL

Volume IV

CHAPEL HILL, N. C., OCTOBER, 1921

Number 6

## MAGAZINE MATERIAL AS A SPUR TO SELF-EXPRESSION

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THE TEACHER who recognizes in the English classes of the high school the opportunity of the pupil for self-expression finds with the joy of a discoverer that certain assignments bring live responses. Thereafter her work includes a long search for subjects that will help the real boy, the real girl to emerge out of wordlessness. The inchoate thoughts are there. Nothing has demanded that they be set forth. They have slumbered while the students have tried to write what they thought was expected of them.

Now that our purpose is to teach young people rather than subjects we may suggest topics for discussion which lie, perhaps, very near their hearts, but which may have been overlooked partly because of their nearness. To the third and fourth-year student the magazine throws down such gauntlets, at the same time that it suggests the form of the acceptance of the challenge.

While using three consecutive numbers of the *Atlantic Monthly* for daily work in a third-year class, I noticed that some of the students seemed interested in a discursive essay entitled *Polite Society* signed "Mr. Grundy," and I assigned the paper for written discussion, without comment. It was a class, as it happened (and even fatalists admit that classes happen), above the average in mental acumen and in character. I should like to quote more fully than space permits from papers received. Everyone added something to the discussion.

"*Polite Society* expresses the opinion of many toward the present condition of society," writes one of conservative mind. "People lament and shake the head, not because they are ultra-conservative but because they do not wish coarsening influences to affect the lives of their sons and daughters. . . . Mr. Grundy's contrast between the ball-room of the present and that of other days brings up the problem of appreciation of art and beauty. The author mentions the beautiful music that the middle-aged person danced to. When we compare it to the modern 'jazz' music, we cannot but feel that the taste of our time is much poorer than the taste of former generations. The music of an age seems to express the people, and as this is a time of speed, jazz

music is the expression of the time. But as only good things endure, jazz will pass, better music will take its place, and more graceful dancing, too, will result."

In the course of the paper the student makes but one slight criticism of Mr. Grundy, who "failed to notice the greater efficiency that people have at the present time. In gaining it, however, many characters have deteriorated. If the lost qualities could only be regained and combined with the present, then this combination would doubly enrich the people of our time."

So conciliatory a tone, however, is taken by only a few of the class. Most disagree in part. Some consider "Polite Society" "over-drawn" or "one-sided." "It is good but exaggerated."

"Young people when they know that they are being watched or criticized, oftentimes go as far as they can to see aggravation grow," is the explanation of a student whose own behavior is exemplary.

"It seems to be the girls to whom most of the criticism is addressed." Several of the girls give this in one form or other as an objection. One of the few who accepts the criticism of girls frankly, thus takes her stand:

"I think that the girls are guilty in that many of them have not backbone enough to do something worth while instead of flirting and camouflaging. . . . Last of all I consider the young men very much to blame. I know from observation that many boys will encourage certain types of girls and then laugh at them behind their backs. I think that this is very wrong, because if they would not encourage such girls, these girls would soon reform."

An exceptionally well-trained boy does "not agree with Mr. Grundy when he says that men have no authority over their sons and daughters. (He may be right when he says they have no authority over their wives.)"

Another boy writes: "Mr. Grundy takes the stand of an observer and not a participant; consequently his opinion is frank and almost unbiased. He discusses in a frank manner a topic which is shunned by society in general. [Here, having discovered a slip in supposititious arithmetic, he pauses to try a sling-shot on Mr. Grundy in this fashion:] "Mr. Grundy says, 'A hun-

dred years ago a young girl who wished to attract the affections of a young man would act in a coy manner, and now her granddaughter acts differently. What I wish to point out is this: A generation is twenty years as an approximation. Say that the young girl married at the age of twenty. In a year or so her daughter was born, and twenty years later the daughter married. The granddaughter of the first maiden would be somewhere toward sixty years of age. Is that the right age for a girl to marry? [but he returns from his numerical impertinence and proceeds sedately]:

"I concur with Mr. Grundy except in regard to his imagined newspaper headline saying that chivalry and modesty are both dead. Of course this is supposed to be the opinion of the narrow-minded parents and grandparents, but he seems to agree, or at least he does not refute the statement. Now was not 'chivalry and modesty dying' harped on by countless thousands during past generations, and did chivalry and modesty die? No, they grew stronger and exercised wider sway. Do not historians and scientists say that the human race, meaning society, is slowly becoming better morally as well as mentally? A generation ago the youths of San Francisco and other cities were denizens and patrons of such places as The Barbary Coast. In this city there used to be depraved men and women who would drag down the rising youth to their degrading level. Now temptation is removed. When young men and women are free from training influences, will their characters and actions not improve? Assuredly they will, and the evidence is strong that the improvement has already gained tremendous headway.

A girl writes, "Mr. Grundy's article on 'Polite Society' shows that this is the age of extremes. He declares that the young people of today are altogether too bold. He shows the greatest possible contrast between the ball-room of today and of a hundred years ago. The girls and boys are now not satisfied with simple and graceful dancing and slow sweet music. Everything is 'jazz.' They want jazzy music, jazzy dancing and jazzy partners. There is the cheek-to-cheek dancing, too, which I believe should be put a stop to.

"I don't think that Mr. Grundy is especially correct in his statement about the modern girl ensnaring the heart of a man. He says that 'she seizes a roll of bread, dextrously slings it across the table, avoiding intervening heads, and with a raucous cry of "Hi there. Catch it, you boob." Has flung her gauntlet into the arena of popularity.' At parties they throw candy hearts with verses on, but I never hear of throwing rolls of bread. . . The young people certainly do

go to extremes in some things. I believe Mr. Grundy is correct in wanting the young people themselves to alter these conditions."

One student suggests: "Isn't it noticeable that all this hoydenism and discourtesy are found chiefly among young people who do not know better and who are seeking and finding pleasure where they can? It must be rather difficult, if one has been fed on dances, motion pictures, etc., as pastimes to imagine that concerts, hiking, or a game of tennis can offer as much amusement. When all well-to-do parents revolutionize their methods with the result of an elevation of their children's ideals and consequently of their conduct, their poorer companions would naturally aspire to and imitate their behavior, just as their fads have hitherto been copied."

A girl who has distinguished herself for good school citizenship writes: "In some things I agree with Mr. Grundy although I do not think it is right that he should condemn society as a whole for what a few do. He has shown very plainly that no one is willing to shoulder the responsibility for what the younger generation does. Yet from what he has said he put a lot of the responsibility on the younger and not on the older members of society. I think the older members should be held responsible for what the younger members do, because they follow the examples set by their elders. The best illustration of this is the quoted conversation of a young man with a woman many years his senior: 'Mrs. W, have you a cigarette I can have? I want to teach "M" how to smoke!'"

A serious-minded girl makes this somewhat disquieting statement:

"The majority of boys will not notice a girl unless she does some thing that is not especially ladylike. I think any girl will agree with me on this point."

One boy pleads for frank forewarning: "If the parents of boys and girls would be fair to their children and talk to them in such a way as to warn them, instead of being so timid as they are, society would immediately show an improvement. Mr. Grundy places too much of the blame upon the young people."

A demure and exemplary girl thinks that "The modern generation is too much nagged at. . . If Mr. Grundy let the younger generation alone and addressed his appeals for increased decency to some of the older dames who parade the ball-room so scantily clad, it might be to better effect." She thinks that "Mr. Grundy places too much responsibility upon the shoulders of the mother. It should be equally shared by the father. The majority of modern girls have come to think mainly of their father as a source of funds, and not as a companion and adviser. It is the

father's business to make himself indispensable in these ways to his daughter, and I consider it as much his responsibility as the mother's to see that the girl grows up to be all that is desirable."

(The worm turns.) She continues: "I think it is just as much the work of young men to keep society pure and respectable as it is for girls. But when society becomes degraded, it is considered all our fault. They call us the weaker sex and then expect us to carry the larger load of responsibility."

In many of the papers submitted, I felt that the real students were speaking, as they had not spoken in any previous paper assigned. They were for the most part eager to defend youth. They approached the subject with deep seriousness, slightly resentful at anything like "making fun." I have observed the same attitude in the comments of other high school students on Tarkington's *Seventeen*. Some dismiss it with a frank statement that they do not like it; many show that they feel pained or injured. The mention of the book gives one the impression that a subject immodest or at least highly improper has been introduced, as the class waits helplessly for some one to change the subject.

Similarly my students resented in Mr. Grundy's article anything that seemed like ridicule of young people, the boys, especially, rejecting as impossible the example of the youth

"Who went to the party  
And ate just as hearty  
As if he'd been really invited."

Only one of the twenty commented that *Polite Society* was written in a humorous style.

The demand of young people is that they be taken seriously. When in the present chaos one considers the integrating force in such organization as the Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A., Clubs, Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, Christian Endeavor and other church societies, the various agricultural clubs, the Girls High School League of Southern California and many others, one concludes that an organization with high ideals that places responsibility on youth is a force for good in that its positive *Do* supersedes Mrs. Grundy's reiterated *Don't*. You murmur "over-organized." I admit it, over-organized in an attempt to make good the failure of the parents; but these organizations at least take young people seriously and give them something to do—the double demand of childhood and youth, too often met with the unsatisfying, "Go and play; have a good time." They will play. They will have a good time, but they ask that we coöperate with them

in their earnest desire for a constructive part in life. Such coöperation that arbiter of society, "Mrs. Grundy," never gave. She only made cruel use of the adolescent fear of being different from other people. It will never be written in full, the suffering of youth under the reign of Mrs. Grundy. School exercises are safe channels for the outflow of repressed emotions.

Every young person has opinions, and in the magazine we may find the challenge in response to which he will express those opinions. The close association with the writer will have its effect upon the student's expression. In the papers quoted each writer was essaying to speak Mr. Grundy's language on a subject of common interest.

Rightfully used, the magazine in the class-room becomes not only an impulse and a guide toward self-expression but also leads toward, rather than away from, a love of books. By their use we may bridge over the gulf that exists in the students' minds between the present and the past. To the student who has never cared for reading, who has been brought up on the comic supplement and the movie, the magazine may give a sense of the reality of the subject. He may at least approach with a Pan-like effort to grasp it before it disappears into the reeds of bound books which to him too often seem

"As dry as the bullrushes round little Moses  
That grew on the banks of the Nile."

#### ACCREDITED COLLEGES OF THE SOUTH

The following colleges and universities were rated as "accredited" by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools at its meeting in Chattanooga last December:

Vanderbilt University, University of North Carolina, University of the South, University of Mississippi, Washington and Lee University, Trinity College, University of Tennessee, University of Alabama, University of Missouri, University of Texas, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Tulane University, Goucher College, University of Virginia, Randolph-Macon College, Agnes Scott College, University of Georgia, Richmond College, University of Chattanooga, Millsaps College, University of Florida, Johns Hopkins University, Florida State College for Women, University of Louisville, University of Kentucky, George Peabody College for Teachers, Southwestern University of Texas, The College of Charleston, University of South Carolina, Emory University, Davidson College, Wofford College, Hampden-Sidney College.